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# RELIGIOUS PERPLEXITIES

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# RELIGIOUS PERPLEXITIES

BY

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"Perplexed, yet not unto despair"

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RELIGIOUS PERPLEXITIES. I

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## FOREWORD

THE substance of this little book was delivered in the form of two lectures given at the invitation of the Hibbert Trustees in Manchester, Liverpool, Leeds and Birmingham during March and April, 1922. On revising the spoken word for the press I have made certain rearrangements which seemed to be required in committing the lectures to the printed form. The first section is wholly new and may be considered as a short introduction to the main theme. Such an introduction is, I think, needed, but the time at my disposal did not allow of its inclusion in the oral delivery of the lectures.

L. P. J.



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## I: The Source of Perplexity



# I: The Source of Perplexity

THE first and greatest of religious perplexities, the source of all the rest, arises in the mysterious fact of our existence as individual souls. Our perplexities spring from the very root of life. Why are we here at all?

Did we but know the purpose for which we are present in the world, should we not have in our hands the key to all the questions we raise about God, freedom, duty and immortality? But if we know not why we are here how can we hope to answer these other questions?

Or again, if we were forced to acknowledge that our existence has no purpose at all, would it not be futile to embark on inquiries concerning God, freedom, duty and immortality? What meaning could these terms have for beings who had learnt that their own existence was purposeless?

The Westminster Confession affirms that the true end of man is "To glorify God and to

enjoy him for ever." A splendid saying! But might not God be better glorified, and more fully enjoyed, if the particular soul inhabiting my own body, with all its errors and defects, had not been suffered to appear upon the scene? Might not another soul, sent into the universe instead of mine, have played that part infinitely better than I can ever hope to do? Why, then, among the host of possibilities, did the lot fall upon *me*? Why *me*? Why *you*?

Why should God need to be glorified, or enjoyed, by you, by me, by anyone? Why should he need anything? If, as some affirm, the universe is the dwelling-place of the All Perfect, what reason can be given for the existence, side by side with that All Perfect one, or within him, of a multitude of imperfect images of his Perfection—like you and me? In the presence of One who has all purposes already fulfilled in himself what purpose can be served by our introduction into the scheme of things? If you and I, and all such, were to be blotted out forthwith and the All Perfect left in sole possession of the universe, where would be the loss? You and I are apparently superfluous.

Philosophers, both ancient and modern, have addressed themselves to this problem, not altogether, I think, without success, and yet not quite successfully. Their arguments have not removed but greatly deepened the mystery of our existence, bringing it to a critical point where we must either accept it or run away from life and its perils—to the point, in fact, where we must choose between life and death. If we choose life we accept the risk that its burden may prove too heavy for us. If death, we escape the perils of life but forfeit our share in its victories.

The former is the heroic choice; the latter the cowardly. As Carlyle was never tired of repeating, the ultimate question which every man has to face and answer for himself is this: "Wilt thou be a hero or a coward?" No philosophy can relieve us from the responsibility of having to make that choice. All that philosophy can do, and it is a great thing to accomplish even this, is to bring us to the point where we see that the choice has to be made. This it does by forcing us to raise the question: "Why am I here? For what end have I been sent into the world?"

But let us inquire more closely what philosophers have done by way of bringing us to this point—the point where a final decision between heroism and cowardice becomes inevitable.

To the argument that *we* are superfluous, that with a Perfect God in possession of the universe no reason can be given why imperfect beings should be here at all, the philosophers make reply that the One must needs “differentiate itself into a Many,” the Eternal Consciousness “reproduce itself” in a multitude of time-bound mortals like you and me, troublers of the Divine Perfection, which is all the more clearly perfect because it suffers and at last overcomes the trouble that our presence creates.

But while reasons have been offered why the One should thus “reproduce” or “differentiate” itself as a Many, no reason, so far as I am aware, has ever been found, nor ever can be, why there should be just so many of these troublers as there are—no more and no less. Nor why *you* and *I* should be among them. To explain why human units exist, does not explain the existence of any single individual we choose to name—of Julius Cæsar, of Napoleon, of Mr

Lloyd George, whose significance in the universe, it will be admitted, consists not in their being mere human units required to make up a certain number, but in their being just the kind of men they happen to be. So too the proof that a human unit must needs be there to fill the niche in time and space you now occupy is no proof that *you*, and no other, must needs be the unit in question. Another, substituted in your place, could play the part of one in a multitude as well as you, and the theory of the One and the Many would not even notice the change. But it would make a notable difference to the facts. And as with the units, so with the totality. If the number of souls now drawing the breath of life were halved or doubled, nay, if they were all suddenly blotted out and their places filled by an entirely new multitude, men, angels or devils as the case might be, philosophy might still maintain its theory of the One and the Many as though nothing had happened. Why these rather than those? Why *you*? Why *me*? Philosophy precipitates this question and leaves it, at the end of all theorising, unanswered, poignant and tremendous. "Who can say positively," writes

Sir Leslie Stephen, "that it would not be better for the world at large if his neck were wrung five minutes hence?"<sup>1</sup>

Unable, as every man is, to give a convincing reason why he should be here at all, or why, being here, he should remain here any longer,—unable to prove that it would not be better for the world at large, if all necks, his own included, were wrung five minutes hence—is there not something fundamentally irrational in our determination to continue in existence as long as we possibly can—that universal will-to-live, which forms the basis of all particular volitions, and supplies the motive power to our plans, purposes, preparations and policies for our own or others' good? Challenged to show cause why we should linger here a moment longer, what answer could any of us give that would have the slightest claim to "the universal validity of reason"? Reason cannot be bullied into acquiescence by the importance of individuals in their own eyes. Was there ever a great man whose sudden extinction would not have been hailed with joy by a considerable section of his contemporaries, or a little one who would not

<sup>1</sup> *A Bad Five Minutes in the Alps.*

have made things pleasanter for somebody by taking himself off?

If we limit the word "rational" to the processes of thought which issue in demonstrations after the manner of mathematical arguments, and if all behaviour is to be termed irrational which involves the taking of a risk, I see no escape from the conclusion that human life is infected with irrationality at its very core. So far as any of us act upon the assumption that it is better for us to exist than not to exist we are assuming what can ever be "proved."

But, for my own part, I am not prepared to put these limitations on the word "rational." The traditional logic of the schools, on which this notion of rationality is founded, turns out on examination to cover no more than a departmental activity of the human mind. The type of conclusion to which it leads us is determined in advance by the rules it lays down for its own procedure, in the one department where such procedure is possible. Free activity, which is the essence of self-consciousness, and the life of all creative work, lies entirely outside its province, and the attempt to deal with it by

departmental rules yields nothing but the rank absurdity that freedom itself is absurd.<sup>1</sup> The logic in question may be compared to a locomotive engine which can move only on the rails that have been laid down for it; and the philosopher who would apprehend the things of the spirit by the means which it affords him is like a man who rides an engine rather than a horse when he goes to hunt a fox. Logical machinery cannot follow the movement of the live spirit, nor arrest it even for a moment's inspection. Within its own province the rule of the traditional logic is, indeed, absolute. But to make that province co-extensive with the realm of truth, to extend the laws which govern it into the universal laws of spirit is a fatal pedantry. So extended, our logic leads not to truth but to falsehood and, ultimately, to the paralysis of the very thought it seeks to regulate, nay, to the extinction of thought itself. This procedure has no claim whatever to usurp the name of "reason," but rather stands condemned as the very type of what is unreasonable. Let those who deny this prove, if they can, in terms

<sup>1</sup> See an article in the *Hibbert Journal* for April 1922 by Howard V. Knox, "Is Determinism Rational?"

acceptable to universal reason, that it would "not be better for the world at large if their necks were wrung five minutes hence."

There is a coward and a hero in the breast of every man. Each of the pair has a "logic" of his own adapted to his particular purpose and aim—which is safety for the coward and victory for the hero. The two are perpetually at variance, the reason of the one being the unreason of the other, the truth of the one being the falsehood of the other. The inner strife, the division in our nature, the law in our members warring against the law of our mind, on which so many great doctrines of religion have hinged, has its origin at this point. Anyone who watches himself narrowly may observe the strife going on, and going on in just this form,—as an argument between the coward within him, who is out for safety, and the hero within him, who is out for victory. They have little common ground and can barely understand each other's speech.

Everything the hero proposes is unreasonable to the coward. Everything the coward proposes is detestable to the hero. The hero

would pour spikenard on the head of his beloved—that would be victorious. The coward would sell it and give the money to the poor—that would be “safer.” The coward sees a danger in having children and limits his family. The hero would have many sons. On all such points the coward, judged by the standard of what passes muster as logic, is a better reasoner than the hero. But the hero, though he has less to say for himself, when brought before the seat of judgment, is nearer to the fountain head of Reason. Would not the offence of the Cross, submitted at the time to a sanhedrim of “logical” experts, have been condemned as unadulterated folly? Such a sanhedrim is always in session within a man, and the hero has much ado to stand up to its decrees.

Religion is a power which develops the hero in the man at the expense of the coward in the man. As the change proceeds there comes a moment when the cowardly method of reasoning, with its eye on safety, ceases to dominate the soul. At the same moment the heroic element awakes and looks with longing towards the dangerous mountain-tops. Thenceforward the man’s reason becomes the organ of the new

spirit that is in him, no longer fettered to the self-centre, but mounting up with wings as an eagle. His powers as a reasoner are enriched, his survey of the facts more comprehensive, his insight into their significance more penetrating.

Religion has sometimes been represented as introducing a new faculty called "faith" into the man's life, as adding this faith to the reason he had before, or perhaps as driving reason out and putting faith in its place. This is a misconception. Faith is neither a substitute for reason nor an addition to it. Faith is nothing else than reason grown courageous—reason raised to its highest power, expanded to its widest vision. Its advent marks the point where the hero within the man is getting the better of the coward, where safety, as the prime object of life, is losing its charm and another Object, hazardous but beautiful, dimly seen but deeply loved, has begun to tempt the awakened soul.

Another way of saying the same thing is to name religion the "new birth" of the soul. But a new birth which, while changing all the rest of the man, left his reason unchanged, which turned all the rest of him into a hero, but kept

him still reasoning with a coward's logic, would not amount to very much. Unless I am mistaken the new birth must begin in the seat of reason if it is to begin at all. Is not the man's reason the very essence of the man? How then, can he be converted at all unless he is converted there?

Most of the "defences of religion" that I am acquainted with ignore all this. They claim to address themselves to reason. And so indeed they do, but to reason in a low stage of its development, to the half-born reason of the timid and unemancipated soul, to the unheroic side of human nature, treating us as beings whose ultimate interest is to save our own skins, and making use of the logic, admirable on its own field, which self-interest has worked out for that very purpose and which is incapable of reaching any other conclusion. Instead of raising reason to the full-grown stature of religion, they bring religion down to the level of reason while still at the stage of learning the alphabet of its business. To this class of argument belong Locke's "proof" of the existence of God, and Paley's of a Beneficent Designer. These

argue as though the search for God were like the search for a lost key or for an invisible carpenter. To the same class may be assigned a more modern type of apologia, which accommodates religion to the supposed demands of physical science, or equates the Kingdom of Heaven with social reform, or domesticates the eternal values to the service of temporal utility, or harmonises God with democracy, or with whatever else may be the popular obsession of the moment—all of them based on the principle of making concessions to the unconverted reason of carnal men, thereby sacrificing the higher logic of the spirit to the lower logic of the senses.

These constructions have no continuance. A slight shifting in the point of view, a new "demand" from science, a step forward (or backward) in the higher criticism, a change in the prevalent political obsession, a fit of sickness in democratic aspiration, and down they all go under a breath of the logic that created them, the modernism of to-day becoming the obscurantism of to-morrow. Then the work of accommodation must begin afresh; new concessions are offered to "reason," with the result

that rebellious criticism breaks out at another point. Or the cry is raised, by desperate men, that religion is not an affair of the "head" but of the "heart"—as though a religion in which the "head" and the "heart" were at variance could be anything else than a fatal disease of the soul. And may not these apostles of the "heart" be reminded that their proposal to exclude the "head" from the pale of religion has neither force nor meaning until the "head" itself has ratified the bargain and consented to its own exclusion? Which the "head" is not likely to do.

If, then, we are to limit the word "reason" to that side of us to which the aforesaid logic makes its approach, we should realise from the outset that none of us can adduce the faintest shadow of reason why he should exist at all, or why, in Sir Leslie Stephen's words, it were not better for the world at large if his neck were wrung five minutes hence. Indeed, if the half-born logic of the unconverted reason is to rule our actions, I am inclined to think that the advice to commit universal suicide would be at least as "logical" as any other that philos-

ophy could tender to the human race at the present moment.

But the advice would not be accepted. Rightly or wrongly each one of us insists on regarding his own existence as a fact of some significance—insists on believing that, on the whole, it is better for him to be here than not to be here. However firmly we may be convinced that the One has done its duty when it has differentiated itself into a Many, there is none of us who would take lightly to the proposal that he, John Smith, as one of the Many, should forthwith be blotted out, and another, Wong Fu, placed in the gap left vacant by his disappearance. To most of us, I believe, nay to all, it does make an enormous difference whether the particular niche in question is filled by Wong Fu or by *me*, but a difference for which we should find it extremely difficult to give a “logical” account.

In my youth I was much in contact with a group of excellent Christians who held that the number of the “saved” had been definitely fixed by divine preordination, the extremists placing it as low as 40,000. But looking back on those times I now see that the ardour with which we

believed these things was strictly relevant to the hope each of us entertained that he himself might be included in the number aforesaid. I am very sure that our faith would have collapsed immediately had the revelation been made that the elect were composed exclusively of converted Chinamen. Our conception of the One and the Many was not so disinterested or abstract as to exclude ourselves from a fair chance of having a share in whatever good things happened to be going.

And so it always is, even where more enlightened philosophies prevail. The significance of the universe, whatever it may be, is, ultimately, its significance for *me*; which is another way of saying that I attach importance to the fact that just I, and nobody else, am here to perceive the significance.

There are certain forms of mysticism, mostly Indian, which would wean us from all this. They would delete the value which the soul perceives in being just this soul and no other. But I am very sure they do not succeed. Whatever fascination the thought of being absorbed into the Infinite may have for me depends on my keeping it in mind that it is I, and not some-

body else, who is being absorbed. "To be interested in one's finite self to the point of wanting to get rid of it is to have a high sense of one's own importance." A divine egoism is here indicated which the subject of religion shares with the Object. "*I am the Lord thy God. Thou shalt have no other God but me.*"

In describing the value a man finds in his own existence as illogical, as a thing for which no reason can be given, I am referring to logic and reason as they are understood in the schools and made use of in the superficial war of minds, the lower logic and the lower reason of the unconverted or unheroic mind. But, illogical though it be in that construction, I nevertheless regard it—this value which each man finds in his being the man he is—as the growing point of the higher logic which, when fully born, reveals the Kingdoms of the Real. This is the root of the intuition of value, the first point of contact between the human mind and the things that are eternal, Beauty, Goodness and Truth. Morally it takes the form of courage, which is the foundation of virtue. In a world where no reason can be given why *this* soul should exist at all, *this* soul nevertheless resolves to

*create* a reason by its own valour, in the sure and certain faith that the universe, indifferent to the coward, will be friendly to the hero, will respond to his effort, will lend him its own creative energy, and bring him at last, in fellowship with the Divine Spirit which first prompted his attempt, to the haven where he would be.

The life of this heroic spirit is religion in being. But can we go further and name it Christianity? I think we can. It is to the heroic spirit, waiting in all of us for the Divine summons which shall call it from death to life, that the figure of Christ, dominating the ages, makes its great appeal. But of this more hereafter.

## **II: Religious Perplexity in General**



## II: Religious Perplexity in General

THERE is such a thing as the will-to-disbelieve. It is impervious to all appeals. No reason so cogent can be given for believing in the reality of anything but that human ingenuity, egged on by the will-to-disbelieve, can find some means of casting doubt upon it.

In this respect, religious belief is no worse off than any other kind of belief whatsoever. We can find grounds for doubting our own identity, for doubting the multiplication table, for doubting the fundamental axioms of thought—if *we are determined to find them*. On all these beliefs doubt has, in fact, been cast by resolute doubters. Nothing is proof against the will-to-disbelieve, not even disbelief itself. Every scepticism makes assumptions which a deeper scepticism can question. No reason can be given for doubting which a sufficiently obstinate doubter cannot doubt. No reason for

believing, but a more ardent believer will find it inadequate. Here doubt and belief resemble one another.

The will-to-disbelieve is as necessary a part of our equipment as the will to believe: the two wills being indeed the same in principle, but the opposite in application. The former is a weapon of defence, a protection against deceivers, never more useful than when engaged in exposing shams, fraud and cant practised under the name of religion. The latter is a weapon of attack, the principle of all that is creative in human life. It is akin to love, the most valiant of all qualities, whether it appears in a tigress defending her cubs or in a martyr dying for mankind.

If we fall under the power of the will-to-disbelieve, we shall indeed be well protected from fraud, but ill equipped for the creation of new values, either in our own life or in that of others, which is the prime business of man. For this we need the will to believe that the new values are possible, which the will-to-disbelieve can always doubt.

I cannot agree with those philosophers who

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maintain that religion is based on the will-to-believe. The two are clearly connected; but it would be truer to say that the will-to-believe is based on religion. Religion encourages a man to act on the assumption that the best things are possible, and checks the will-to-disbelieve precisely at the point where it questions this. It is the God within the man which so acts, and the moment the man perceives its divine origin the will-to-believe acquires a new energy. God is not a product, but the author and living principle of the will-to-believe.

The will-to-disbelieve, if given a free rein, would at last involve us in a depth of scepticism indistinguishable from complete cowardice. But in actual life it never goes to this length, except in the world of pure dialectics and in asylums for the insane. However sceptically inclined a man may be, there comes a point where he suspends his will-to-disbelieve in favour of the proposition that Truth (and perhaps Beauty and Goodness also) is better than the opposite, though it is quite easy for anyone so minded, and with a little skill in dialectics, to find a point of view from which even this can be doubted. Unless the sceptic believed that

Truth is better than its opposite why should he take the trouble to convict his opponent of error or to satisfy himself of the soundness of his own opinions? Clearly he has made his choice at that point—a truly heroic choice if we consider it—committing himself to a position which needs courage to maintain, and thereby proving that he is no coward. In his own way he has faced and bravely answered the question which, in one form or another, has to be faced and answered by everyone. He has chosen to be a hero.

Over every *aspect* of human life there hangs the *prospect* of a possible better, inviting us to achieve it, but without proof that we shall succeed, or even that it is worth our while to make the attempt. The coward within us asks for the proof; cries out that the venture is not *safe*, and summoning the will-to-disbelieve has no difficulty in finding reasons for rejecting the invitation. The hero, on the contrary, finds in the terms offered the exact conditions to which his nature is fitted to respond. He would rather *create* the proof by his own valour than have it for nothing from the outset. He is not dismayed at finding himself in a universe which

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puts him under no *compulsion* to believe in God, Freedom, Duty and Immortality. As a free soul he prefers not to be *compelled* to believe in anything—for how then could he be free? The offer of a logic that cannot be gainsaid does not attract him, for he knows very well that his will-to-disbelieve can gainsay any logic that may be produced—he can meet it all, if so minded, with the Everlasting No. He finds his own nature as hero exquisitely adapted to the nature of the universe as dangerous—on that side the ringing challenge, on this the joyous response; man and the universe engaged together as loyal confederates in the task of creating a better-than-what-is.

Such are the respective arguments of the coward and the hero. Let it be remembered that these are not the names of two different men. They are names for the same man, as one or other element of his nature comes uppermost. Both are clamant at this moment in you and me, clamant in you as you read these words, clamant in me as I write them.

The will-to-disbelieve is always most active where the controversial interest reigns supreme; least active where men, in a spirit of mu-

tual loyalty, are engaged together in the positive attempt to achieve a better-than-what-is. Into the relations of true lovers the will-to-disbelieve never enters, though a Mephistopheles, standing by, can always find reasons enough for prompting it, and sneer at them for a brace of fools. The will of the true lovers is to believe in each other and to reject all suggestions to the contrary. They will trust each other to the uttermost, in spite of the fact that no conclusive reason can be given why they should do so—heroic lovers that they are! But whenever a human interest, great or small, is detached from its roots in reality and turned into a subject for the war of minds, every assertion made by the one side is a challenge to the other to assert the contrary. The will-to-disbelieve is then in its glory, and finds there are no lengths to which it cannot go. The more it is hammered, the greater its vigour, the greater its ingenuity, in hitting back. Meanwhile both sides are drifting further away from realities and the primary interest in dispute succumbing to the secondary interests of mere controversy. The dominant motive of the controversy has now ceased to be the search for truth and become the resolution

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of the disputants to overthrow their opponents and not be overthrown. There is no issue. From the nature of the forces engaged the controversy becomes endless.

As the mere plaything of professional controversialists the fate of religion can never be decided. The professional controversialists themselves do not desire that it should be; their interest is to keep the game up for ever; for if a final issue were reached their occupation would be gone. Happily for religion, its fate does not depend on the fortunes of this ever-swaying battle. It depends on the answer given by individual men and women to the question which faces them all over the gateway of life—"Wilt thou be a hero or a coward?"

Religion is one of those high things, and there are many such in life, which lose their meaning when they are over-defended, or over-explained. In explaining them we are apt to explain them away, and without being aware that we are doing so. Whenever the truths of religion are too much defended they are cheapened; and when cheapened they become incredible. Like the love of a man and a woman,

or the belief we have in the loyalty of our dearest friends, or the joy we feel in the presence of beauty, or the grief of a broken heart, they resent being made into mere topics for discussion. For this reason religion has suffered as much from its would-be friends as from its avowed enemies. To official Defenders of the Faith, crowned, mitred or wigged, the Faith owes less than the Defenders in question have been wont to claim. I have even heard it suggested, by extremists, that there would be more believers in God if all the theologians would take themselves off.

If religion is founded on Reality, as we are so fond of asserting, we have no need to be over-anxious about its defence, since Reality can always be trusted in the long run to look after itself and its children. We compromise religion whenever our defence of it seems to imply that its fortunes depend on us or on our arguments, an impression too often created by apologetic literature—the impression of something naturally weak which needs an immense amount of argumentative coddling to keep it alive. I observe none of this in the presentation of religion by the Founder of Christianity. His

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freedom from anxiety for the morrow covered the fundamentals of faith.

The weakest religions, and the weakest phases in the history of every religion, are those which spend most energy in defending themselves; the strongest are those which *attack* the oppositions, difficulties, disproportions, iniquities, perils and mysteries that beset the soul.

Seen on the self-defensive, religion is apt to appear at its worst. It rises to its best in the moment of attack. It represents the expeditious force of the soul, in its native element where mysteries are encountered, where the seemingly impossible has to be attempted, where creative work has to be done and where the call to play the man is never silent. Most of the quarrels and divisions among believers, which exhaust the energies meant for a Diviner Object, and deface the history of religion, turn on the question of its defence. On the side of defence religion falls asunder into sects which spend themselves in achieving mutual paralysis. On the side of attack its forces converge. Religion is rather that which defends us than that which we have to defend. It stands for the at-

tack upon the powers of darkness and of spiritual wickedness, in high places and in low.

The defence of religion has been overdone. We have cooped up the faith in theological fortresses, surrounding it with an immense array of outworks—creeds, dogmas, apologetics, institutions—and we have used up our resources in holding our “positions” against one another when we ought to have been attacking the common enemy in the open field. These outworks and defences, intended to save us from perplexity, have become a greater source of perplexity than all the rest. It takes a lifetime to understand them, and when understood most of them turn out futile.

It is the fashion nowadays to express alarm about the future of religion. Hardly a day passes but we hear some utterance, read some document, which sounds that note. But look closely and you will often discover that what these people are really alarmed about is not religion itself, but one or other of the entrenched camps in which religion has been cooped up. Where is the church, where is the sect, where is the creed-bolstered institution, unhampered by the cares of these great for-

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tresses? And indeed they are not safe. There is no place on earth where a man's soul is less safe than when it immures itself in one of these masterpieces of military architecture, mostly mediæval. We live in an age of long-range artillery and of high explosives.

Are you then in search of a religion which will relieve you of perplexity, remove peril out of your path, and surround your soul with an unassailable rampart against doubt? I have to confess that I know of none such. But I know of at least one religion which does far greater things than these.

In the first place, the religion I am thinking of brings all our perplexities to a focus; lifts them up on high; concentrates them on two or three burning points, and shows us with a clearness that admits of no mistaking what a tremendous mystery we are up against in life.

That is the first thing that a true religion does. But if it did that only, it would do us no good but harm, for it would overwhelm us. So it does the second. While on the one hand it reveals to us, as I have said, the deep and amazing mystery of our existence, on the other it reveals something yet deeper and more amazing

in ourselves, something divine in everyone of us, which is more than a match for what it has to face. A true religion does both things, does them together, in the same moment, in the same act. It throws a searchlight on our perplexities and raises them to a high level. But in the very act of so doing it raises the greatness of man to a higher level still. It sharpens our consciousness of evil; thereby deepening our consciousness of that in ourselves which opposes evil. Hear the Baron von Hügel. "Christianity has not explained suffering and evil; no one has done so; no one can do so. Yet it has done two things greater, more profound and more profitable for us. From the first it has immensely widened and deepened the fact, the reality, the awful potency and baffling mystery of sorrow, pain, sin, things which abide with man across the ages. But Christianity has also, from the first, increased the capacity, the wondrous secret and force, which issues in a practical, living, loving transcendence, utilisation, transformation of sorrow and pain and even of sin. Christianity gave to our souls the strength and the faith to grasp life's nettle."

Observe that Christianity has done this *from*

*the first.* And to the last it will do the same. So far as I can see the religious perplexities of to-day are not essentially different from those of other times. They have indeed become more vocal, and there are more people who can talk about them intelligently. But their nature is unchanged. The first point to be noted about the religious perplexities of to-day is their essential identity with those of yesterday. They spring from the same root and they gather round the same centres. Too much is being made of the special difficulties besetting religion at the passing moment, those, for example, connected with the progress of science and with the higher criticism—as though this were the age of religious difficulty *par excellence*. Surely that is a mistake. The difficulties of faith have *always* been up to the limit of human endurance. Religious belief has *always* required the full courage of the soul to sustain its high propositions. It has *always* been a “near thing,” and those who speak of past ages when it was easy are grossly misreading the history of the human mind. What science and the higher criticism have done is to turn attention upon new points, to divert perplexities into new channels, but

not to alter their essential character, not to change the stuff of which they are made. The fact of evil is no discovery of the present age; it has been challenging the faith of men for thousands of years; there is nothing more poignant to be said about it to-day than was said ages ago by the patriarch Job. The great troubles have not changed. Suffering and death, the agony of bereavement, the tragedies of blighted hopes and shipwrecked lives—these are not things peculiar to the twentieth century.

In stressing the difficulties that come from science and criticism, are we not in danger of losing sight of those greater and permanent difficulties that enter into the very structure of human life, and “abide with men across the ages”? A broken heart is the same in one age, in one place, as in another: and wherever it exists the soul of man has all that it can bear. Those who have faced these major perplexities and conquered them, those who have passed through the Valley of Humiliation and emerged victorious at the other end, will not be greatly troubled by science and the higher criticism. But those who begin their approach to religion by reconciling science with faith, or adjusting

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the Creeds to the higher criticism, or solving conundrums about the omnipotence of God, or making one set of abstractions fit in with another, will find that all this argumentation avails them very little when the lightning falls on the roof tree, or the Angel of Death spreads his black wings over the house.

We are sometimes told that the Great War has enormously increased the religious perplexities of mankind. I cannot see that it has. All the problems it suggests, all the questions it raises, were equally contained in the lesser wars that went before it, and even if the great one had never occurred, there would still be enough suffering in the world to challenge the strongest faith. An age which has needed the Great War to rouse it to a sense of tragedy must have been living in a fool's paradise up to date. Every problem suggested by the Great War has been there, plain for all ages to see, since suffering and death, since folly and wickedness, first came into the world. I do not doubt that the war has administered a salutary shock to multitudes of lethargic souls who would otherwise have continued to sleep on in the sleep of spiritual death. But with the Christian Churches it is different.

It ill becomes them to treat the horrors of the war as a novelty in human experience. All that the war can mean for them was summarised long ago by the man who saw the "whole creation groaning and travailing in pain together until now."

We can change the nature of our religious perplexities, change them from things that depress into things that exalt us. But we cannot banish them altogether. At the end of our labours, as at the beginning, we shall find ourselves perplexed, *but not unto despair*. These last words make the difference, and it is immense. They were uttered by one who was deeply versed in the spiritual life.

"The present crisis in religion" is another phrase which recent discussion has made familiar. That such a crisis exists no one in his senses can doubt. But the phrase is often used in a way which suggests that the "crisis" has no right to exist, that it constitutes a misfortune peculiar to our own time, that it is an unnatural thing, and that religion will never come to its own until the "crisis" has passed away.

We find, however, that a "crisis" in religion

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is no new experience, peculiar to the present day. The only ages of the past when a "crisis" in religion did not exist were the spiritually dead ages. Whenever the spirit of God has breathed upon the souls of men the effect has been to awaken the sense of a great crisis. The Epistles of St Paul are full of it. In the Confessions of St Augustine, written in the fifth century, we see how critical he felt the then passing moment to be. There was a crisis at the Reformation, and at the Renaissance. There was a crisis when printing was invented, and when the Bible was translated. There was a crisis when Whitefield and Wesley were urging the masses to flee from the wrath to come. A more recent example can be found in the writings of Carlyle. Everything that has been said since the Great War about the spiritual bankruptcy of Europe, about the need of religious reconstruction, about a change of heart in nations, and governments and individuals, as the only alternative to a complete disaster, was said by Carlyle three-quarters of a century ago, and said by him with a force and trenchancy not since surpassed. Here, for example, is what he wrote in the year 1850.

“In the days that are passing over us, even fools are arrested to ask the meaning of them; few of the generations of men have seen more impressive days. Days of endless calamity, disruption, dislocation, confusion worse confounded. . . . It is not a small hope that will suffice us, the ruin being clearly . . . universal. There must be a new world if there is to be a world at all. That human beings in Europe can ever return to the old sorry routine, and proceed with any steadiness or continuance therein—this small hope is not now a tenable one. These days of universal death must be days of universal rebirth, if the ruin is not to be total and final. It is a time to make the dullest man consider whence he came and whither he is bound. A veritable New Era to the foolish as well as to the wise” (*Latter-Day Pamphlets*).

That was written seventy-two years ago, and when was it truer than to-day? The “religious crisis” is perennial, now taking one form, now another, but always demanding from those who have to face it the utmost of their courage, loyalty and love.

The religious crises which take place in the

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great world, in the conditions of the age and so forth, are only the enlarged reflections of personal crises constantly occurring to ourselves, which, even if they were absent from the general conditions of the age, would still present themselves, in our private experience, so long as suffering and death were elements in life. The existence of a crisis is not unnatural to religion, but perfectly natural, the atmosphere in which it breathes most freely, the soil in which it strikes its deepest root. We are wholly mistaking what religion is when we think of it as some secret or power which is going to banish the great crises of our experience and leave us with none to face. The truth is the very opposite.

The penalty—no, not the penalty but the high reward—of having any religion that is worth the name, is that it will conduct us into critical situations, that it will reveal perplexities where without it none would exist. From some perplexities religion does indeed give release. It gives release from those that are not worthy of us, that belittle us when we indulge them, that make us selfish, timid and unloving—the care for self, the fear that something dreadful may happen to us, either in this world or in

the next, unless we take immense precautions against its happening. But in releasing from these perplexities, which are not worthy of us, it confronts us with others on a higher level, where our finer essence finds the employment for which it was made. Instead of hiding the great crises, instead of banishing them, or giving us anæsthetics to make us unconscious of their presence, religion reveals them, makes us aware of them, sharpens our consciousness of their presence; but at the same time reveals us to ourselves as beings who are capable of overcoming them. If on the one hand it uncovers the pain of life and makes us feel it with a new intensity, on the other it liberates the love that conquers pain, a power mightier than death and sharper than agony.

One might almost define religion in these terms. That in each of us, and in all of us which faces the crisis, which rises to meet it, which feels, when confronted by it, that its hour is come and for this cause it came into the world.

Do you say it is *hard*? It would be if we were made of poorer stuff. But made as we are anything less would be too small for us,

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would leave us dissatisfied, hungry and half employed. Yes, half employed, and not the best half either. We are so made that until we "grasp the nettle of life" the best part of us has nothing to do, loitering, so to speak, at the street corners of life, like a starving labourer out of work. On that upper level, where the best that is in us confronts the highest that is demanded of us, we discover how finely the nature of man is adapted to the world in which he lives, how well the two accord, the noblest element in the one corresponding to the most challenging element in the other, so that deep answers unto deep and the two make music together. On the lower levels there is no adaptation; our selfish desires are at odds with nature; we are out for a good time and get no response; and there all is disenchantment, disappointment and misery. But the keynote of the higher level is joy—the joy of the labourer who has found his work, of the lover who has seen his object, of the hero who has received his commission and his sword.

Towards the end of the war, or perhaps shortly afterwards, somebody coined a more attractive phrase which was much on the lips

of exuberant reformers. They were going to make, so they said, "A world fit for heroes to live in."

What kind of a world is that? Is comfort the keynote of it? Does it provide the hero with an assured income and an easy life? Does it guarantee him a pension for any heroism he displays? Does it ask of its heroes only a limited term of service, and then superannuate them at an early age, exposing them to peril for a short time and after that withdrawing dangers from their path and surrounding them with the safeguards of a protected respectability?

No; what these arrangements provide for is not the life of heroism, but its death. Give the hero a world like that and what will he say? "This world," he will say, "is *not* fit for me to live in. It spells extinction to all that makes life worth living to me. It is the flat opposite to what I desire. It lacks everything that makes the world divine. No God can dwell within it. No Christ will ever visit its melancholy shores."

And yet, is it not something like this that many of us have had in mind of late when we have been talking of "A world fit for heroes

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to live in"? Have we not conceived it as a world where heroism is a mere incident, almost an accident, which comes in brief patches and spells, and when the rest of life is given over to the middling virtues and to prearranged satisfactions? There are people who cry out for this; there is something within us all that cries out for it; but the noblest part of us scorns it; the heroic spirit would not have it at any price.

When the hero asks for a world fit for him to live in he is thinking of something wholly different. He desires no satisfaction save that which is the direct fruit of his own loyalty and self-devotion. He wants continuous employment on the level of his highest self, where love never sleeps at her task, and where the voices of faith and hope, whispering of new worlds to conquer, are never silent. A divine universe is, for him, just that; it breeds ideals for great souls to pursue; gives them incentives to the pursuit; shares with them in the perils of it; suffers with them in their failures and triumphs with them in their victories. Is the Soul of the World at one with us in these great endeavours? Does it meet us on that high level

with the companionship of a Spirit akin to ours, not only asking for our loyalty, but giving it in return? If so, God exists; the universe is divine; and the world is fit for heroes to live in. Hallelujah, for the Lord reigneth!

This is the side of our nature which Christianity brought to light, in all its splendour and power, when it revealed us to ourselves in the person of Christ—that, in all of us, which stands above the perplexities of life and is more than a match for them; which sees evil with the clearest eye, and at the same time overcomes it with the deepest love. At home in the bright hours of life, which grow brighter under the radiance it pours into them, the Christ within is always ready when the dark ones arrive. “I am equal to that,” it cries. “Through the power that is given me, through the fellowship I have with the heart of a Divine universe, I can turn that evil into good, and transfigure that sorrow into joy, and draw the stream of a deeper life from the very thing that threatens to slay me. Now is the time, here is the place, to show my Divine Creator that he has not made me for nothing! For this cause was I born and for this hour came I into the world.”

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On the surface of things there is discord, confusion and want of adaptation; but dig down, first to the centre of the world, and then to the centre of your own nature, and you will find a most wonderful correspondence, a most beautiful harmony, between the two—the world made for the hero and the hero made for the world.

Whoever embarks on the task of religious inquiry, which is tantamount to inquiry into the meaning of his life—a question he would have no interest in asking unless he were fundamentally a religious being,—whoever embarks on this task will find the ground encumbered with a multitude of preconceptions which warp the mind at every point and render independent judgment extremely difficult. Unless the inquirer keeps a watch upon himself his mind will run in a groove from the outset. And when he has followed his groove as far as it goes and found *nothing* at the end of it, he will conclude that religion has broken down. But in nine cases out of ten he will perceive, if he reflects on what has happened, that the groove which has led to this result was cut by minds not pri-

marily interested in religion but bent on protecting some quite alien interest, possibly a vested interest, institutional or political, to which religion had proved itself serviceable.

The most obstinate of these misconceptions, and the deepest of the grooves in which they run, are those connected with the term "God."

There is no worldly interest which has not been anxious to secure God for an ally. In all ages the attempt has been made to domesticate the idea of God to the secular purposes of individuals and of groups. If we examine the current forms of the idea we may observe the marks of this domesticating process at many points. For example, the idea of God as the sovereign potentate, governing the universe under a system of iron law, the legislator of nature and the taskmaster of the soul, the rewarder of them that obey and the punisher of them that disobey, is plainly an idea borrowed from politics, the form of the idea most convenient to those who need God as an ally in the maintenance of law and order as they conceive them.

This does not prove the idea untrue to reality; it may conceivably be used as a strong argu-

ment to the contrary. At the same time it puts us on our guard, warning us to look out for other forms of "domestication" which may be less in accord with essential truth than the one I have just mentioned. Certainly it is extremely difficult to find any form of the idea of God which has retained a purely spiritual or religious character throughout the entire course of its history. Between the conception of Deity implied in the teachings of Jesus and the conception as it appears in "God save the King" the distance is immense; and few theologians I imagine would be so hardy or so patriotic as to affirm that the latter conception is nearer to the Divine Reality.

The theologian who takes up the proof of the existence of God should make it clear, both to himself and to his audience, at which end of this long line, which has not been one of "development," he lays the emphasis. Any proof of the existence of "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" would certainly prove the non-existence of the being adumbrated in "God save the King"; and vice versa. Which may be expanded into a more general proposition. Reasons given in favour of a spiritual or re-

ligious conception of God become less and less valid exactly in proportion as we approach its secular modifications; while reasons given in favour of these latter are worthless as proofs of the spiritual reality. Most of our difficulties in believing in God arise from the fact that God, in our meaning of the term, is no longer "spirit" (as Jesus said), but spirit shorn of its freedom and reduced to the dimensions of some human utility or purpose—that is, not "spirit" at all.

For these reasons I will venture to suggest to anyone who is perplexed by doubts about the reality of God, not to trust the fortunes of his faith too unreservedly to the field of mere argumentation. If he does so he runs a serious risk of falling, without being aware of it, into one of the many grooves of thought, which alien interests have cut deep into the ground of theological controversy, leading the mind in a direction contrary to that in which spiritual reality is to be found. Neither let him deem himself an atheist because he cannot believe in the Deity adumbrated by "God save the King." Rather let him conceive it possible that God is speaking to him in his refusal to believe in *that* God. Let him seek God in the very heart of

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his doubts about God, saying to himself words such as these:

“God, if there be such an one, will reveal himself as a companion spirit in my endeavour to achieve a better-than-what-is; incidentally therefore in my rejection of all debased, or even man-made, images of himself. He will not consent to be the servant of men’s designs, or the ally of their policies, not even when these things clothe themselves in great words spelt with capital letters—like Democracy. He will not even submit to the shackles of their forms of thought.”

I suggest further that the only final mode of ascertaining whether or no such a God exists is *by experiment*, standing or falling by the issue, and resorting to the methods of argumentation only to confirm or elucidate the results so obtained. The experiment first, the argumentation second.

But of what nature is the experiment in question? I conceive it being made in the following manner:

“Of the many Gods, or conceptions of God, that are offered me, the only one I am concerned to believe in, and should find it a calamity not

to believe in, is the God who is sympathetic, and *actively* sympathetic, on the lines of my determination to achieve a better-than-what-is. Omnipotence and Omniscience I could dispense with if need be; the disappearance of the Cosmic Potentate would not leave me orphaned; the Absolute does not enthrall me and I should suffer no nightmare were I to learn that it did not exist. But were I forced to admit that the universe, as a whole, is quite indifferent to this desire of mine to achieve a better-than-what-is, that there is nothing in its nature which shares my interest in that matter, nothing there that backs me up, nothing to which the failure or success of my attempt makes the slightest difference, then indeed a dark and cruel blight would fall upon my soul.

“To that blight I may have to submit. But I will not submit until I have tested the universe in the only way that is open to me. I will trust it as a friend. There are those about me who say that my trust will not be betrayed, having made the same experiment themselves. They remind me that the world I am living in is not *any* kind of world, but just the one particular kind needed by a soul whose business

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it is to create new values, in the way of Truth, Beauty and Goodness; that its laws, forces and material readily lend themselves to the purpose of anyone who will use them for that high creative end, turning out, in fact, to be the very kind of laws, forces and material which such an one needs. Well then, I will see. I will base my life on the assumption that somewhere, in the height above or in the depth below, Power is waiting to back me up. That Power, if I find it, shall be my God. Is it not reasonable to suppose that, if it exists, it will find some means of making me aware of its presence? That then shall be my experiment, and I will abide by the result."

A person who reasons with himself in this manner is taking the most practical, and the wisest means I know of to determine the question whether God exists. For my own part I should view his experiment with hope proportioned to his sincerity. Frankly, I should expect him to make discovery of the Living God, as a reality, as a companion, as a friend. Whether to the reality, companion, friend, so discovered he gave the name "God," or some other name, I should not regard as a matter of

supreme importance. If he chose to call it Christ, or more simply "the Spirit," I should not quarrel with him. The discovery is far too momentous to be imperilled for a name. Its value lies not in its name but in its *reality*. "Few things are easier," says John Henry Newman, "than to use the name of God and mean nothing by it." Call it then by a name which means something, and not by a name which means nothing.

All religious testimony, so far as I can interpret its meaning, converges towards a single point, namely this. There is that in the world, call it what you will, which responds to the confidence of those who trust it, declaring itself, to them, as a fellow-worker in the pursuit of the Eternal Values, meeting their loyalty to it with reciprocal loyalty to them, and coming in at critical moments when the need of its sympathy is greatest; the conclusion being, that wherever there is a soul in darkness, obstruction or misery, there also is a Power which can help, deliver, illuminate and gladden that soul. This is the Helper of men, sharing their business as Creators of Value, nearest at hand when the worst has to be encountered; the companion of

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the brave, the upholder of the loyal, the friend of the lover, the healer of the broken, the joy of the victorious—the God who is spirit, the God who is love.

Had more been heard about this, the God of religion, and less about that other—the lawyer's God, whose main concern is the policing of his universe—our religious perplexities would not be what they are. I do not say they would be easier. They might be harder. But they would lose their character as irritants and become, instead, incentives to humane relationships, to noble living and to creative work. For there are two kinds of religious perplexity. In the one, perplexity overcomes religion; in the other, religion overcomes perplexity. "We are perplexed, yet not unto despair."



### III: Perplexity in the Christian Religion



### III: Perplexity in the Christian Religion

THOSE who are wondering in what form Christianity is destined to survive, or whether it will survive at all,<sup>1</sup> would be well advised to keep in mind two significant facts, discernible enough even when the view is limited to our own country, but obvious on a wider survey of what is going forward in foreign lands: first, that the lay mind has definitely passed beyond clerical control; second, that the most active religious minds, both among the clergy and the laity, but among the laity most of all, are learning to use their own eyes in the search for God, instead of looking for Him through the ill-matched lenses of Jew-Greek binoculars, and are gradually ceasing to think about Christ and his religion in terms of the recognised "isms"—Catholicism, Protestantism, Anglicanism, Mod-

<sup>1</sup>For doubts on this point see the last chapter of *Our Social Heritage*, by Professor Graham Wallas.

ernism, Trinitarianism, Unitarianism, or any other. They have passed beyond all that and are probing deeper ground. They are judging spiritual things by spiritual.

If these things are so, and somewhat exceptional opportunities of observing have convinced me that they are,<sup>1</sup> it would seem to follow that the form in which Christianity is destined to survive (if it survives at all) will not be the form of any of the "isms" aforesaid. In other words, even if the battle of the "isms," as this is now carried on by professional controversialists and mainly on clerical ground, were to issue in the final victory of one of them over the others—of which at present there is little prospect—this would decide nothing as to the fortunes of Christianity in the world at large. Thus, though we have no indication of what the surviving form of Christianity will be, we have a pretty clear indication of what it will not be. Beyond this it seems impossible to cast the horoscope of Christianity at the present time. Its fortunes have always been unpredictable; each new development a surprise to those

<sup>1</sup>I refer to the fact that for the last twenty years I have been Editor of the *Hibbert Journal*.

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who witnessed it. "As the lightning . . . so shall be the coming of the Son of Man."

The application of this to what follows will be obvious as we proceed.

To Bishop Gore's denial that Christianity has failed, on the ground that "it has never been tried," Mr Graham Wallas makes the effective reply that a religion that has been adopted by the great States of the world for fifteen centuries and never been "tried" is a religion that has failed. In this Mr Wallas follows the proper method of judging Christianity by its own high standards, which certainly require that it should have been tried ere this. "What thou doest do *quickly*" was spoken to Judas Iscariot. Does it follow that "What thou doest do *slowly*, putting it off, if it so pleases, for fifteen centuries" was intended to be the motto of the Christian Church?

The command to "sell all that thou hast and give to the poor" was doubtless spoken "to a particular young man on a particular occasion." But the parable of the Good Samaritan, with its pungent ending "go and do thou likewise," was also spoken to a particular lawyer on a par-

ticular occasion. And so with the teachings of Christ in general. All his universals were seen in particulars. If, then, we are to discharge everything that was spoken "to particular individuals on particular occasions" as inapplicable to modern conditions, or to the world at large, we shall find that there is not much left that we can apply to anything. What, indeed, remains? The "spirit" of it all? Yes: but a very different spirit from that which makes these convenient excisions. Many of the alleged excuses for the failure of Christianity have been pitched in this key. They are unconvincing.

Others fall back on the magic words "slow and gradual," words that have induced many persons to believe that the slower and more gradual a process is the more surely it is divine—as against an earlier thought which armed the gods with thunderbolts. The convenience of this excuse is that no depth of failure can be so extreme as not to be covered by it—just as, in the case cited above, no betrayal of Christ's principles can be so complete as not to be covered by the plea that the principles in question "were spoken to particular individuals on particular occasions." But though the one

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argument is as convenient as the other, it is no more satisfactory to an honest man.

How has it come to pass that respectable Christian apologists have fallen into such flagrant dishonesties?

The cause, I believe, lies in the habit mentioned in the first section of this book—the habit, namely, of applying carnal logic (admirable for carnal purposes) to divine things, not judging spiritual things by spiritual. Anyone who studies this class of apologetics will be struck by their resemblance to a well-known type of political speech, when the spokesman of some discredited Government which has broken all the promises given at the election, attempts to befool his constituents into believing that the promises have been kept. It is all a matter of artfully adjusting the emphasis—the art, as somebody has said, “of keeping the public quiet about one thing by making them noisy about another.” There is, I say, a significant resemblance between this method and that of the Christian apologist when, for example, he exalts the benevolence promoted by Christianity and ignores the parallel fact that no other religion has developed such ferocious internal

differences nor been so cruel in its persecution of unbelievers. There have been moments in the history of Christianity—or of what was called so—when the slaughter of a million men, or the wiping out of an entire civilisation, meant no more to the leaders of the Church than it did, by his own confession, to Napoleon. Witness the treatment meted out by Cortes, in the name of Christ and of his Holy Mother, to the Aztecs of Mexico. But the searchlight is seldom switched on to these things, and even when it is “slow and gradual” will cover them.

This application of carnal logic to things divine, this judging the success of Christianity by the standard of success which passes muster in the crime-stained record of human society—as though it were the business of religion to keep pace with the dawdling, creeping, cowardly movement of mankind to better things, and not to hasten it with urgent calls to repent of its hesitancy—this is only one form, though perhaps the crowning form, in which the Kingdom that is not of this world has been surrendered by its deluded guardians to the kingdoms which are. In that surrender, so long an established fact that we have lost sight of its malign impli-

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cations, so deeply engrained into our mental habits that we have almost forgotten that it exists, lies the true cause of the failure of Christianity, and incidentally of its once atrocious tendency to persecute. For failure most unquestionably there has been: tragic but not irretrievable, if men have the courage to face the facts. Let it be acknowledged! Let an end come swiftly to the invention of sophistries to prove the contrary. That way lies failure deeper still.

The Christian Religion, in the course of its long history, has become entangled with a multitude of things which do not properly belong to it, with philosophies, with dogmatic systems, with political ideas, with the vested interests of great institutions; and especially with the habits of mind which have grown up with these things, this last, the entanglement with deeply entrenched habits of mind, being the most formidable of them all. These entanglements are another name for our perplexities. They are so many and so deep that it becomes a matter of difficulty to extract the original

genius of Christianity, to recover its original impulse and power.

It has become the fashion to rejoice in these entanglements. Men say that Christianity, by becoming entangled with these foreign elements, has permeated them with its spirit, acting upon them like leaven and so transfiguring them with its own value. That view I cannot share: at least not without great reservations. Were it not truer to say that these foreign elements, these outside things, these worldly philosophies and institutions, have rather permeated Christianity with their spirit than suffered Christianity to permeate them with its own? No one in his senses will deny that Christianity has done something to make these worldly things better. They would all be much worse than they are if Christianity had never touched them. But, on the other hand, Christianity would be much better than it is if they had never touched it. They have distorted it; have maimed it; have devitalised it at essential points. Dean Inge is speaking the truth when he says that Christianity has become secularised. It has become secularised not only in its outward form, but in something far deeper,

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namely, in its habits of thought, in its standard of values, and especially in its strivings for power, this last being the characteristic vice of the kingdoms that are of this world. Is it not a fact that for a long time past the Churches of Christendom have been engaged in strife as to who shall be greatest? There can be no surer sign of secularisation than that.

Christianity, in the official, or authorised presentation of it, is a *smothered* religion; smothered almost to the point of total asphyxiation and collapse, but not quite; smothered by the vested interests of great institutions, and by the ambitions, fears and self-seekings that such interests breed; smothered by the elaborate theological defences that Christians have built, not against Antichrist, but against each other; smothered by anxieties, not unnatural in these embroilments, for its own future. If you take Christianity along with its entanglements, encumbrances and unnatural alliances: if you present it with all the secular baggage which the ages have fastened upon it, you will then find it a hopelessly perplexing thing, a thing which neither Reason nor Faith, whether acting singly or in combination, can accept.

But alongside the authorised version, and sometimes hidden within it as an inextinguishable spark of life, Christianity has an unauthorised version, which the former has often repressed, persecuted and condemned to the hangman or to the eternal flames. Of this unauthorised version a fair copy exists in the hearts of men, a fairer copy in the hearts of women, and the fairest copy of all in the hearts of children—for Christianity is pre-eminently a religion of the young. It is the unauthorised version which has kept Christianity alive through the ages and defied the smotherers even to this day.

Turning to the sources of Christianity in the first three Gospels we are struck by an immense contrast. There is no money in the purse, no victuals in the wallet, no munitions in the magazine, no baggage-train, no commissariat, no provision for trench warfare, and no thought of it. We are in the presence of elemental realities, more beautiful than Solomon in all his glory, more majestic than the successor of St Peter in all his pomp. We are in another atmosphere. All this apparatus of defence and apology, of preaching and propaganda, of church policies

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and chapel oppositions,—things which have given a form so strangely artificial to our conceptions of Christianity—are here either secondary or absent altogether. Religion, instead of being concentrated into strong Sunday doses, is here a pervasive, unobtrusive presence, that cometh not with observation, the luminous background of human conduct, the hiding-place of the light which irradiates the whole picture of man's life. Even the name of God, which comes to our lips so easily—too easily—was used by Jesus with a reverential rarity. You may read whole pages of the Gospels without finding it once.

Jesus, we say, preached the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man. But he was not *always* preaching them, and as a matter of fact he never mentioned either of them in exactly those terms. He enforced them, illustrated them, revealed them, exemplified them, by living as though they were true, which is a very different thing from “preaching” them. His days were spent going about doing good, his preaching being little more than a comment that arose naturally from the good that he did. The Gospel is neither a sermon nor a treatise

on religion; but a *story*, which tells how Christianity began in something that happened, in a deed that was done, in a life that was lived. It abounds in parables and is a parable itself, revealing things hidden from the foundation of the world.

The order in which *we* take these elements of religion—first, moral and religious propaganda, then performance to follow—is here reversed. The performance comes first; the propaganda, which reduces itself to the very simple form “Go and do thou likewise,” comes afterwards. The proportions, too, are different. Instead of an immense campaign of preaching which leaves little energy for doing the things preached about, the work done, the life lived here overshadow everything else. The accusation of Carlyle against modern civilisation, that it has run to seed in mere talk, parliamentary eloquence, stump oratory, and such like, has no application to the birth of the Christian religion. Something to talk about, something worth talking about, was furnished before the talking began.

There we touch the dynamic principle of Christianity, cut free from its entanglements

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with a mass of things that do not belong to it; the power which still keeps it alive under a mountain of verbal accretions that would smother anything less divine. In the beginning was the deed: go thou and do likewise. So presented, Christianity is not perplexing; but quite the most convincing religion ever offered either to the intellect or the heart. The perplexities have arisen from the reversal of the true order; from the attempt to subordinate the thing done to the thing said; to lay the foundations in argument and propaganda which can only be laid in actual performance; and from the loss of reality and the descent into hollowness and windiness which inevitably follows when the talkers get the upper hand of the doers, or when theology gets the upper hand of religion, which is the same thing. The deeds that I do, these bear witness of me. What other conceivable witness could there be?

Not only has Christianity evolved an institutional selfishness which shows plain signs of having been copied from the kingdoms that are of this world—the strife among churches as to which shall be greatest proves that—but the very form of its thought has become infected

with ideas from the same source. Even philosophers have a difficulty of getting away from the notion that the universe is an immense political state, which most assuredly it is not; while careless thinkers will constantly refer to the laws of nature as though they were legal enactments, to which they bear no resemblance. At no point has Christianity become more deeply secularised. Instead of the Kingdom which is *not* of this world transfiguring the kingdoms that are, lifting them up to its own level, where every term of law is translated into a term of love, and the very notion of a Kingdom passes into that of a Father's house of many mansions, the reverse process has taken place. Love has forsaken its mission of converting law to its own essence, and become a timid and apologetic fugitive, harried by the police.

No wonder that men declare themselves perplexed by Christianity. No wonder they find this mixture unacceptable. No wonder that official Christianity, tied up as it is with a political system which manages its own business none too well, is continually breaking down under the assaults of a critical age, which has

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grown almost as tired of the one thing as of the other.

I am far from saying that Christianity excludes the idea of God as the moral Governor of the universe or forbids us so to think of him. But it does not *begin* with that idea, as we are apt to do. It allows us to arrive at it, perhaps, at the end of a long pilgrimage in experience; but if we never get there at all it makes no lamentation, pulls no long face, and does not treat us as lost souls. It does not say "Begin with the idea of a Cosmic Potentate and make everything else fit in with that." It does not require us to dismiss from our minds as blasphemous every thought of God which makes him other than the omnipotent legislator of the universe. In the religion of Jesus I am struck by the absence, by the total absence, of all these pompous conceptions of the Divine Nature, which show such speaking signs of having originated under lawyers' wigs.

The idea that I do find seems to have originated in a very intimate and loving comradeship with man and with nature. Indeed, the religion of Jesus is precisely this spirit of comradeship raised to its highest power, the spirit which

perceives itself to be "not alone," but lovingly befriended and supported, extending its intuitions to the heart of the world, to the core of reality, and finding there the fellowship, the loyalty, the powerful response, the *love*, of which the finest fellowships and loyalties of earth are the shadows and the foretaste. In its essence the Gospel is a call to make the same experiment, the experiment of comradeship, the experiment of fellowship, the experiment of trusting the heart of things, throwing self-care to the winds, in the sure and certain faith that you will not be deserted, forsaken nor betrayed, and that your ultimate interests are perfectly secure in the hands of the Great Companion. This insight, this sure and firm apprehension of a spirit at hand, swiftly responsive to any trust we have in its answering fidelity, coming our way the moment we beckon it, motionless and irresponsive till we hoist the flag of our faith and claim its fellowship, but then mighty to save—this is the centre, the kernel, the growing point of the Christian religion, which, when we have it all else is secure, and when we have it not all else is precarious. God, said Jesus, is

spirit: man is spirit no less; and when the two meet in fellowship there is religion.

I am approaching my conclusion and must gather up my threads.

All along my theme has been that we make a mistake when we look to religion to relieve us of the perplexities and difficulties of life, whether intellectual or moral. In a sense we should look for the opposite. Religion will bring our perplexities to a focus; will concentrate them on a point; will show us in one clear and burning vision the depth of the mystery that confronts us in life. But in raising our difficulties to that high level it will raise our nature to a higher level still, by liberating faith, courage and love, qualities that spring from a single root. In revealing the world as a world fit for heroes to live in, that is, a difficult world, it will arouse also the heroic spirit in ourselves, which is fit to live under those conditions. It will give us a part to play in life which puts our souls on their mettle at many points, but it will also give the spiritual power which stands the strain and even rejoices in it. It will show the Cross we have to bear; but it

will also show the Christ who bears it, and will awaken the Christ, as a victorious principle, within us all. Pain and suffering it will not remove; but it will quicken a divine substance within us, which is more than conqueror over these things. And, lastly, when courage, faith and love have won the victory at the supreme point of their trial, and so established themselves as the ruling powers, it will turn these qualities back upon life as a whole, will interpenetrate everything with their energy, and transfigure everything with their radiance, and raise everything to their level, and so fill the world with music and beauty and joy.

So, then, in expecting religion to reconcile the world with our notions of a "good time"; to smooth and simplify our path; to accommodate itself to what we, in our weaker moments, desire—in looking for this we look for what is not forthcoming. Religion will meet us, not on the level of our weakest moments, but on the level of our strongest. It will give us power rather than satisfaction; courage to face danger rather than safeguards against it; inspiration rather than explanation. Whatever satisfaction it brings will come through the power;

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whatever safeguards, through the courage; whatever explanation, through the inspiration. It will not teach us to see no evil in the world; but immensely increase our resources for dealing with evil when seen. A power in the world which is for ever on the side of those who are brave enough to trust it, causing all things to work together for their ultimate good, and making them conquerors, and more than conquerors, over whatever confronts them, whether in life or in death,—this, and nothing less than this, is what we have to expect and to ask for. Our mistake has been not that we have asked for too much, but that we have asked for too little.

A true religion will be optimistic. It will end in a radiant and joyous vision of the meaning of life. But it will not begin with that, will not give us that for nothing. The radiant and joyous vision will not come to us through listening to arguments, through proving that there is more happiness than misery in the world, through shutting our eyes to the dark side of things and looking only at the bright, through crying "Peace, peace" when there is no peace, nor by any of the cheap and shallow devices on which mere verbal optimism is made to rest.

We must win our optimism at the sword's point. We must pay the price. We must go through "the Dark Valley" and not listen to the man who thinks he knows of a way round. At certain stages of the journey we shall see the whole creation, as St Paul did, groaning and travailing together in pain until now; and only at the last stage, when loyalty has stood the test, shall we see this world of suffering and death delivered, by redeeming love, into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

Such a religion as I have been trying to describe will be found in Christianity—yes, and in other religions also. Far be it from me to set up an exclusive claim for Christianity at this point. Anyone who does that goes a long way towards forfeiting his title to be called a Christian. Let each of us look for truth where it is most accessible and where it speaks the language he best understands. For most of us here Christianity has this advantage. It gives the sharpest point to the challenge of life as we know life.

Christianity is the simplest and most difficult religion in the world, best adapted therefore for strong races, endowed with deep but silent

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affections, and with the plain-dealing mind whose conversation is "Yea, yea and nay, nay." But here let me utter a word of warning.

There is an outcry in these days for a Christianity shorn of its complications, and reduced to its simplest and most intelligible form. It is a thing greatly to be desired. I have been pleading for it in what has gone before. But let nobody suppose that, when Christianity has been reduced to its simplest and most intelligible form, it will be found an easy religion to put into practice. It will be found immensely more difficult than before. Only there will be this further difference. Whereas the old difficulties, those that came from presenting Christianity in complicated forms, merely irritated and confused us and caused us to waste ourselves upon irrelevance, the new ones, the difficulties of simple Christianity, meet us on a far higher level, introduce us to essentials, and give us a battle to fight that is really worth fighting. That is an enormous difference, but not in the direction of making simple Christianity easier than the other kind.

It has been said that Christianity reduced to its simplest and most intelligible form needs

only two words to express it—"Follow me." It has been said, also, that if all Christian men for the next twenty years would give up the attempt to *explain* Christ and devote their attention to *following* him, at the end of that time they would know more about the person of Christ than they had ever known before, and they would have put Christianity in a posture to conquer the world. I accept all that. But before we claim that our problem is solved, let us think for a moment what "following Christ" really means, and to what it commits us, when we make it the keyword of simple Christianity.

Whoever sets out to follow Christ will have to follow him a long way and to follow him into some dark places. The path we have to follow is a narrow one. It runs all the time on the edge of a precipitous mystery, sometimes taking you up to the sunlit heights and the Mount of Transfiguration, and sometimes taking you down into the fires of suffering and into the shadows of death. Following Christ means that when you find these dizzy things before you, these dark things in your path, you go through them and not round them. Have you a good head? Have you a stout heart? Are

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you loyal to the leader in front? Easy enough while the road runs by the shining shores of the Lake of Galilee, but not so easy when it turns into the Garden of Gethsemane and becomes the Via Dolorosa.

There are those who think they have followed Christ when they have obeyed the precepts of the Sermon on the Mount, loved their neighbour as themselves and done unto others as they would that others should do to them. To follow as far as that is to go a long way, much longer indeed than most of us can claim to have gone. But to stop *there* is to stop in the middle, to miss the end of the journey, to come short of the point of arrival, where the key lies to the meaning and value of all that has gone before. We are too apt to rest in the thought that to follow Christ is merely to follow a teacher or a reformer, so that enough has been done when we have repeated his doctrine of Fatherhood and brotherhood, voted for his precepts, and practised as much of them as we can, or perhaps only as much as we find convenient. Let there be no mistake as to the inadequacy of all that, whether presented in a simple form or any other. To follow Christ is to

follow a victor in life's battle, a conqueror over suffering and death, through the completeness of his loyalty to the Great Companion. Hence the power which makes his teaching live; hence the driving force which makes his Gospel effective for the regeneration of society.

You see, then, what is involved. Unless we can follow him through the point where his victory was won, all the rest will not amount to very much. We must follow him to the *end* if we are to be his disciples. It is said of his first followers that when they came to this last lap of the journey, when the road before them took that critical turn which led through the Garden of Gethsemane, and became a Via Dolorosa, they all forsook him and fled. Do not some of our modernised versions of Christianity show a similar weakness, a similar reluctance to grasp the nettle, a similar tendency to stop short in their following of Christ precisely at the critical point? They forsake him and flee—flee for their lives!—This it is that makes simple Christianity so difficult; so difficult but so splendid, so infinitely worth achievement.

There was a phase in the ministry of Jesus, a comparatively untroubled one, when he went

about among men in a temper of radiant optimism, declaring his confidence in the Divine Companion, a confidence so complete that all anxiety for the morrow was banished and the soul freed for a life of the utmost generosity and beneficence. "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect." Nothing too bad to be incurable; nothing too good to be hoped for; nothing too high to be attempted; nothing so precious that we cannot afford to give it away. Yes, even that! For there is that within the hero which is so *rich* that he can afford to give his very life away, and be none the poorer, but the richer; a strange discovery, made by many a brave lad during the recent war, as he prepared himself to "go over the top," and thought of his mother or of his beloved.

Then came another phase, such as we too must meet sooner or later, when his mission had to be fulfilled not by saying these things, not by saying anything, but by doing and bearing up to the limit of courage and endurance. The silence of Jesus in the presence of Pilate is the silence of one for whom the day of speech is over and the day of battle begun, the ulti-

matum delivered, and the trumpet sounding the attack. Where are his followers now? They have all run away, as verbal Christianity always runs away when it comes to the critical point. Fugitives from the crisis, every man of them! And what of that radiant optimism that broke out by the shores of the Galilean Lake? Well, it came near to breaking-point, as near as it could without actually giving way. But it held! It carried him through! The infinite Friendliness did not forsake him in his extremity, as his followers had done. At one point he thought it had forsaken him, but it had not. For its nature is to be as true to the loyal soul as any loyal soul can be to it; waiting to attest its presence wherever the courage exists to make the experiment of trusting it. All prayers to it sum themselves up into one, which when it comes from the heart makes other prayers almost unnecessary—"Into thy hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit." *In tuas manus, Domine, meam animam commisi.*

So far, then, as I am able to understand these high matters, there is no such thing for any of us as getting rid of religious perplexity. But there is such a thing as exchanging the per-

plexities which depress and weaken our nature for those which exalt and strengthen it. This world is ill adapted to the fearful and the unbelieving; but most exquisitely adapted to the loyal, the loving and the brave. To poltroonery of one kind or another the Spirit makes no concessions; it wears the face of a hard master to all pusillanimous demands. To its own children it is not only gracious but faithful. It gives them commissions bearing the sign manual of God; shares their perplexities; goes with them into their battles; stands by them in their time of need; interprets their bright hours to a ten-fold brightness; and changes the mystery of their pain from an unfathomable darkness to an unfathomable light.

Behind the battle of the Creeds lies the battle of life—a much more serious affair. Wherever the seriousness of the greater battle is deeply felt the acrimony of the lesser is mitigated. The two battles are not unconnected, but let us take them in their right order. Churches and sects which begin by fighting for their creeds are apt to end by fighting for their own importance—which is contrary to the spirit of

the Christian religion and to the express command of Christ. Are there not some among us who think that the way to establish their own creed is to destroy the creeds of their neighbours? But is that so? Does the flourishing of my form of Christianity depend on the languishing of yours? I say it does not! The more your form prospers the better for mine. Christianity is big enough to find room for both of us. The more devout you are in holding and practising what you believe the more you help me in being faithful to what I profess. There is only one way in which the truth or falsity of any creed can be demonstrated—that is, by trying whether we can live up to it and observing what happens. What is needed, therefore, first of all, is not that we should destroy our neighbour's creed, but that we should help him to live up to it by living up to our own. I know of no other way in which the union of Christendom can be brought about.

THE END







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